



February 21st, 2022

Re: Black and Brown United in Action Testimony in support of HB. 5146

Dear Co-Chair James Maroney, Co-Chair Michael D'Agostino and Members of the General Law Committee,

We are Black and Brown United In Action, a grassroots organization located in New Haven, Connecticut and are testifying in support of HB. 5146. We are committed to the empowerment of Black and Brown communities which are historically food insecure, and supports HB.5146 as it seeks to (1) alleviate hunger among individuals in this state who are in need of nutritional assistance; (2) support the operations of food banks; and (3) reduce food waste in this state.

Food security is a basic need which was not realized by many slaves and immigrants. In truth, a common tactics used by slave owners included depriving the enslaved access to basic needs. Even after being freed, hundreds of thousands of slaves starved to death during the American civil war according to analysis by historian Jim Downs of Connecticut College, which called to question the much told version of American history, and illustrated that freeing of the slaves was a triumphant righting of the wrongs of a southern plantation system that kept millions of black Americans in chains. But, as Downs portrays in his text, this triumph was short lived if at all realized as a result of the war and bloodshed which ensued. The fact was many freed slaves were neglected by union soldiers or faced rampant disease, including horrific outbreaks of smallpox and cholera and others simply starved to death. In a very similarly unfortunate circumstance, many who attempted to cross the border into America either did so starving or dying from starvation after days of traveling without food in a relentless attempt to be free.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as “a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food”. For over 20 years, food insecurity has been assessed and monitored by the USDA at the federal level. Although levels of food insecurity have declined and risen over this period, one trend that has continued to persist is the gap in the prevalence of food insecurity between Black and Brown people and Whites. While there are food assistance programs and pantries in Connecticut, most are unable to meet the need as demand has risen consequent to the ongoing economic crisis. COVID-19, reminded us amongst other inequities that several Black and Brown households are unable to provide for their basic needs due to the increasing cost of living in the state and little supplemental relief. The odds of meeting this essential needs decreases in undocumented households wherein the lack of access to jobs, food, housing and period supplies, all of which are continually rising in cost is even more burdensome as these individuals qualify for very few, if any assistance programs and rely on grassroots organizations such as Unidad Latina en Accion to assist with empowering the community during hard times.

Added to this dilemma, many Black, Brown and undocumented persons work jobs which have odd hours and are unable to make it on time, if at all to many 'drive up and go' or food banks which have been struggling to meet this increasing demand. The irony is that many of the supermarkets profit from food wastage but also employ a good amount of Black and Brown people. While benefiting from COVID relief funded food programs such as emergency SNAP, supermarkets discarded food which could have provided a warm meal for a domestic worker, a home health aide, restaurant employee, bus driver and other essential employees who risked their health and safety to ensure the quality of life remained somewhat normal during and as the pandemic ensued.

This supermarket donation program will assist in reducing wastage while meeting very important essential needs during some extremely difficult times. Black and Brown United in Action supports HB. 5146 and look forward to your support in improving food security.

Sincerely,

Black and Brown United in Action